

CHAPTER 1

Intentions

The development of a child's potential depends on the ability of the teacher to perceive the child's possibilities, to stimulate the child to learn, and thereby to make the child's latent potentiality a reality.

RUDOLF DREIKURS

Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom

WE NEED TO APPROACH THE ISSUES of classroom management and discipline as much more than what to do when children break rules and misbehave. Rather than simply reacting to problems, we need to establish an ongoing curriculum in self-control, social participation, and human development. We need to accept the potential of children to learn these things and the potential of teachers to teach them.

The best methods, the most carefully planned programs, the most intriguing classroom centers, and the most exciting and delicious materials are useless without discipline and management. The children can hurl the Legos and crash the blocks, or they can build fine bridges. They can ingeniously combine rubber bands and paper clips to bombard classmates, or they can construct mobiles and invent robots. The critical difference is the approach to discipline and management. It is not enough (and not possible) to motivate students continually with dazzling demonstrations of paper-plane aeronautics or new adventures. We spend too much time looking for gimmicks and catchy topics to teach when we should be looking for something else. Children don't learn by being entertained. They learn by doing, and by finding success in the doing.

We go into teaching prepared to teach reading, math, writing, and social studies. We prepare for subjects. When I have to stop a lesson to remind Cindy not to interrupt, to address the sarcastic remarks David made to Patty (who gave a wrong answer), or to quiet the voices of students not part of my group, I clench my teeth and mutter about “wasting time.” Incorrectly, I start to feel that discipline is a time-waster, a symptom of problem students and poor teaching. If only I had the good class!

I do love to teach reading, writing, and math. I love to help children decode new words, to share discussions about evil fictional characters, and to help them compose a thoughtful essay. But I’ve also come to love being a “disciplinarian.”

I have grown to appreciate the task of helping children learn to take better care of themselves, of each other, and of their classrooms. It’s not a waste. It’s probably the most enduring thing that I teach. In a world filled with global violence and threats of environmental devastation, where drugs and guns are easily available, learning to be more decent and to build caring communities is hardly a waste of time.

TAKING THE TIME

TIME IS GOLDEN. How we use our precious classroom time defines our priorities. Our schedules often become a battleground for conflicting interests.

In a public school in Connecticut, a number of third through sixth grade classrooms in the school began conducting Morning Meetings as a half-hour ritual each day. The class gathers, gives greetings, shares important news, and enjoys a game or interesting group activity. Teachers, students, and parents overwhelmingly agreed that it contributed to a friendlier, more relaxed atmosphere. “You get to know other people better and find out things about them,” wrote one student.

Both teachers and students looked forward to their Morning Meetings to hear each other’s news, play together, and get set for the day. But two years later, the school’s fall writing mastery test scores were low. There was a school-wide mandate for more writing instruction. Teachers began to ask, “Is it OK if I do my meeting for just twenty minutes?”

The meeting time, which helps children and teachers look forward to school, was put in competition with instructional objectives. Could these teachers squeeze more writing into an already heavily scheduled day? To squeeze in more, they had to squeeze something out—or burst!

In this battle for time, we need to remember that academics and social behavior are profoundly intertwined. In this case, the opportunities to talk and listen in Morning Meeting provided some of the conversation and confidence critical to the

writing process. A responsive audience of teacher and peers offers a powerful incentive to share through writing and to care about school. The more children care about school (because of friendly feelings, the chance to be heard, or things they want to find out), the more likely they are to grow academically as well as socially (Gresham and Elliott 1990).

A curriculum which permits us to teach self-control and social participation takes time. Time to stop lessons when the tone of the room is awful. Time to discuss what went wrong out at recess. Time to tell others about the baseball game, the new baby sister, the death of a pet. Without time in our day to talk to children and to allow them to talk to each other, there will be no discipline, only disciplining.

DISCIPLINE AS LEARNING

THE WORD *DISCIPLINE* is derived from the Latin root *disciplina*, meaning learning. It needs to be associated positively with acts and feats of learning rather than negatively with punishing. Teaching discipline requires two fundamental elements: empathy and structure. Empathy helps us “know” the child, to perceive his/her needs, to hear what s/he is trying to say. Structure allows us to set guidelines and provide necessary limits. Effective, caring discipline requires both empathy and structure.

There are two basic goals in teaching discipline:

- ◆ Creation of self-control
- ◆ Creation of community

Creation of self-control

WE NEED TO STRIVE for the creation of self-control in children. It is the first purpose of classroom management. This purpose is summed up by a quote from John Dewey in his pamphlet *Experience and Education*, first published in 1938. Dewey writes, “The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control” (Dewey 1963, 64).

The key word for me in this quote is “power.” Power, says Dewey, is the ability to “frame purposes, to judge wisely...” (Dewey 1963, 64). The power of self-control is the power to assert oneself in a positive way. It involves the capacities to regulate oneself, to anticipate consequences, and to give up an immediate gratification to realize a long-term goal. It includes the ability to make and carry out a plan, to

solve a problem, to think of a good idea and act on it, to sift alternatives, to make decisions. For children, it is the ability to enter a new group and say hello, to make new friends, to choose activities, and to hold fast to inner thoughts and beliefs. It isn't an innate power, says Dewey, but one that is "created."

I see children, given time and attention, demonstrate the power of self-control daily. I observe five-year-olds during their first week of school trying to sit still in a circle, a clutch of wiggles, wagging hands, and babbling voices. Six weeks later, there is a real semblance of order. They are working on "being the boss" of their own bodies, staying "parked" in their spot, keeping their hands only on themselves, listening. Maggie's hand starts to go up while Mikey is telling a story about his bike. When she sees a slight shake of her teacher's head, she remembers, and her hand goes down. She will wait until Mikey is done talking to tell about her bike, "cause the same thing happened" to her on her bike. Self-control allows listening and waiting.

Aviva and Jason are young adolescents. They bring to their sixth grade classroom a summer's worth of growth in "attitude." They have learned to roll their eyes, to pout and scowl when anything "babyish" is suggested—and just about everything that's suggested is! They are understudies in the drama of "cool," which can mean refusing to participate or play class games and following rules only with a grudging shuffle.



At first, Aviva and Jason feel “picked on” when their teacher lets them know they must work on “controlling their faces” and refraining from other gestures of disdain. Later, as they search for a balance between the requisites of “cool” and a satisfying, controlled involvement in learning with others, they are able to say that they really didn’t intend to offend anyone.

Merely removing external controls, Dewey stated, is not “a guarantee for the production of self-controls.” Instead, it often leaves children “at the mercy of impulses” (Dewey 1963, 65). I have witnessed tense and troubling scenes when teachers abdicate their authority, leaving children without the protective guidelines of clear limits, boundaries, or strategies.

“How will you decide who goes first?” Left on their own, children may decide on the basis of who is biggest and most threatening, who has the loudest voice, or who wears the most expensive clothes. But proposing and modeling some alternatives (odd number of fingers, pick-a-number, cut the deck, “eenie-meenie-minee-mo”) imposes the reins of justice where tyranny or anarchy might have governed.

“You have five minutes to see if you can figure out a way to work together and get along; otherwise, you’ll have to work by yourself. I’ll be back to see what you decided.” Teachers provide choices, even time limits, as a natural constraint so that children don’t keep spinning their wheels, and to assure children that the teacher will help them out of the rut, if necessary. But children need opportunities to make the ruts.

If self-control is established at one point along the continuum of growth, it doesn’t mean that problems, conflicts, and stunning bursts of impulse and disobedience will be erased. Getting older is not a promise of getting better, especially if “better” is to be even-tempered and of predictable mind. Getting older means encountering difficult, and often painful, issues of growing up, separation, and identity. The cheerful five and spirited six may evolve, at seven, into a child troubled by change, clinging to routines, fearful of risks, and worried about criticism. A headache attends every new math lesson. Tears follow the loss of a game of tag. Then the fretful seven becomes the gregarious, easy-going eight, who bounds into school until she decides to join the boys’ kickball game at recess and gets banned from the girls’ clique and jump-rope games.

Our best management techniques will not eliminate these issues from our classrooms. They will only help us deal with them in ways that promote children’s self-control and ethical conduct. I emphasize three main points in this assertion that the first purpose of classroom management is the creation of self-control:

- ◆ We need to teach self-control in the same way we teach our academics, as a recognized and valued part of our school curriculum.

- ♦ Creating self-control involves teachers and children in ongoing interactions which draw on the experiences and context of day-to-day life in school.
- ♦ The acquisition of self-control leads to a more fully engaged and purposeful school life. It fosters positive self-assertion and allows children to plan, make decisions, and carry out purposeful activities. It allows children to become more productive and successful in school.

Creation of community

*What good is academic learning if young people
don't learn to become contributing members of society?*

JANE NELSEN
Positive Discipline

IN TODAY'S WORLD, it is particularly urgent that we extend beyond the domain of self and the lessons of self-control. We need to find connections to others and to feel ourselves members of many groups—intimate groups, community groups, and a world group. These connections and responsibilities need to be taught as well. We need to teach children to give care as well as to receive care. We must help them learn to contribute, to want to contribute.

Belonging to a group means being needed as well as to need, and believing that you have something vital to contribute. Every child can contribute care for others in many ways—by listening with attention and responding with relevance, by showing concern for the feelings and viewpoints of others, by developing a capacity for empathy.

We all have an inherent need to be useful and helpful to others. But because it is inherent doesn't mean that it automatically flourishes or is tapped. In our society, there are people who suffer from a lack of meaningful work. Children, too, can suffer from a partnership of neglect and indulgence that results in a lack of meaningful responsibilities. These children are not expected to demonstrate care, not accustomed to taking care of others. Creating community means giving children the power to care.

My thesaurus shows that the word care has some interesting and varied connotations. It can mean "to take care"—to trouble oneself, to give thought, forethought, painstaking attentions. Or it may mean "to care for"—to provide for, to look after, to show regard. It can also refer to worry, as in "having cares" or "cares and woes."

Thus, caring is a burden, a commitment, hard work. When we teach children to care, we ask them to accept this burden, to commit themselves to the hard work of caring.

Teaching children to care often means helping them find ways to express their care. When confronted with a classmate's loss and sadness, what can they say? What can they do? "You can say 'sorry,'" we tell them. "You can make a card or keep the person company."

I see children struggle to make a place in their group for newcomers. How can they reach out? I know that the new students are lonely, miss their old friends, and need new ones. I see that the other children are unaware, comfortable in their old groupings and familiar routines. They are only eight, I remind myself, still awkward in social behaviors. Yet, they can learn to take notice and respond. With help, they may offer "Want to join our jump-rope game?" or "Want to have lunch at my table?"

"You have a gift to give," I sometimes inform children, as I seek their help in including someone new, or someone it's easier to avoid. There is a clear sense of self-worth, well-being, and pride when children show the ethic of caring. Even though it's seldom spontaneous, it improves the world, and "I," at six or ten or forty, did that improving.

To create community and to teach caring is an ongoing challenge. My group of fourth and fifth graders were planning a party day for the successful completion of their school store. It was a day earned from the proceeds of their work. To start and maintain the store, they had shopped each week, ordered merchandise from catalogues, kept account books, computed prices, and learned to be kindly shopkeepers. They had given over recess times and stayed after school. They had cleaned up. Some had complained of overwork and some had gotten headaches, but they had kept it going for a year, and now they could celebrate.

At first it wasn't clear how to celebrate and how much of the profit from the store might be used for a party. After several discussions, there was a proposal to divide the assets into three chunks. One chunk would be reinvested in the store, but what about the other two? As I listened, I was sorely tempted to manipulate the outcomes. I was queasy during their discussions when the percentages for the "good cause" and "their cause" were tilted in favor of the latter.

The end results were not the most generous. Still, the students were stretching. They were giving some of their earnings to others in the community: the homeless, whom they read and heard about but didn't really see, and the "battered," who were also a faceless presence in their lives. These problems and others were largely abstractions—and these children were still concrete learners. Without direct,

personal experience with these problems, the children's intellectual grasp of these issues had a fragile foothold.

To themselves, the students gave a party: video, pizza, soda, and soccer game. They accepted, with grumbles, the teacher's ruling of no R-rated movies. They accepted, with resignation, that not all would get their first choice, but that no complaints were allowed. They enjoyed their morning movie, their midday pizza lunch, and their afternoon soccer game. Then there was a request for ice cream.

"We still have some money left."

"No. No ice cream," I replied.

"You're mean," said a whiny voice.

"No fair," said another.

"It's our money," joined yet one more.

This went on for a few minutes until I lost patience and felt that a sermon was inevitable and irresistible.

"What a privileged day," I began. "You have enjoyed so much. When you continue to ask for more and use those whiny voices, you sound ungrateful. When you try to manipulate and complain, you sound greedy. I don't like it. It's time to appreciate what you had and stop asking for more."

It was time for an adult to reset the boundaries, to provide limits and expectations. It's still hard at age ten or eleven to locate those end points. Sometimes a teacher simply has to yell "Enough, already!"

There were certainly other stretch marks to this experience. Even with its last-second deterioration, the celebration capped a positive learning experience for the group. They had made group decisions and abided by them. They shared in the enjoyment of their party. They kept to the limits of their spending and honored their pledge to give away one-third of their earnings to help others. I recall one student saying persuasively in class discussion, "Our parents will support the store more if we give money away to a good cause." If that is not the crux of virtue, it still indicates that generosity is expected. It is part of a caring community.

Some years ago, my daughter shared a dream with me. In the dream, she was invisible. No one could see or hear her. She alone could see and hear everyone else. What she could see were people trying frantically to escape as bombs dropped into her school, and what she could hear were cries for help. "Let this be a nightmare!" she screamed. "Let me wake up."

I didn't know how to comfort and reassure my daughter, how to erase her nightmare. I didn't know how to assuage her fears. Should I have lied to her, promised her that the world is safe? That children are not in danger, that violence is not real?

Or should I tell her the truth, that her nightmares aren't much different from many adults', because our world is often circumscribed by violence?

Yet I don't dare be discouraged. I am invigorated by the dedication of so many colleagues and students to making the world a safer place. Part of our mission is to create communities with fewer nightmares, where self-control and care for others minimizes the possibility of violence.

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FIGURE 1.1

Building Community

We build community each day when we expect children to:

- ♦ **Know names**—know and use each other's names, get to know each other's interests and feelings
- ♦ **Take turns**—without arguing, pouting, or quitting
- ♦ **Share**—attention from the class, private time with the teacher, space at the sandbox, space at the computer, snacks, crayons, markers, etc.
- ♦ **Make room in the circle**—for latecomers and for children who aren't "best friends"
- ♦ **Join activities and small groups**—in a constructive way
- ♦ **Invite others to join**
- ♦ **Be friendly**—greet and include others (not only friends) in conversation and activities
- ♦ **Cooperate**—work on projects, solve problems, and play games with input from everyone
- ♦ **Solve conflicts**—by talking about problems, sharing points of view, reaching mutually acceptable decisions without name-calling or hurtful behavior

These community expectations are balanced by respect for individual needs—there are times during the day when you don't have to share, you get to pick your favorite, you get what you really need.

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Allison

A group of three children in the second grade class were seated around a table, busily shaping and molding chunks of clay. Their chatter kept pace with their hand work. The teacher, moving about the room, stopped to observe the threesome.

Allison turned to Bobby and said, "After school, I'm gonna get you...and then I'm gonna punch your head in."

Bobby ignored her and turned to Juan. "Look at mine. It's a flying gorilla."

"Blood will come out of your nose...", continued Allison.

The teacher approached Allison, knelt next to her, and cupped one hand over her clay and the other around her shoulder. "Stop your work for a moment and listen to me."

Allison reached for her clay, but turned back to her teacher. "What?"

"I just heard something that I really don't want to hear in our classroom. I heard some threats. Threats talk about ways to hurt people. You have a much more important job here. Do you know what that job is?"

"No...doing your work?"

"Yes. Doing your work of taking care of each other. That's a very important job that you have here. Not to threaten each other...but to take care of each other. I know that you can do that."

"She won't," announced Bobby suddenly.

The teacher nodded firmly, "She will!" ❖

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